

Zinc grave markers

BY C. W. LATTIN

Don Hall will speak on zinc grave markers at 7:30 p.m. July 26 at the Cobblestone Church at Childs Hall, an authority on zinc (white bronze) grave markers, is the former director of the Strassenburgh Planetarium in Rochester. His illustrated program will show monuments in zinc of various shapes, sizes and designs.

Zinc grave markers were a Victorian phenomenon which found their way to American and Canadian cemeteries from coast to coast from 1873 to 1914.

The markers, marketed as "white bronze," were all made in Bridgeport, Conn., by the Monumental Bronze Company, which would ship the markers, "knocked down" to their subsidiary foundries in Detroit, Des Moines, Iowa, Chicago and St. Thomas, Ontario. They were assembled and shipped for installation.

The markers were sold by independent agents, and the company promised only one sales representative per county.

The main sales points were that the markers were durable, lower cost and progressive, underscoring the Victorian notion that new technology was always better than the old.

The claim of durability has proved to be true, and almost all the markers are as sharp and clear today as they were upon installation. The main defect is with zinc itself. It is a brittle metal, and can be fairly easily broken. Also, especially large monuments required an internal structure to support them so that they would not sag or "creep."

The markers are easy to recognize today because of their sometimes elaborate forms which could not easily be executed in stone, and their blue-gray color.

This talk shows many examples, and gives insights into sand casting which was the manufacturing process. Sand



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casting allowed each monument to be custom modified for the buyer with not only names and dates of the deceased, but also symbols, signs and decorations.

Here was a very American "good idea" which never really caught on.

The zinc monument shown here is the Grinnel one from Mt. Albion Cemetery. It was cast in 1888 and is signed in the base "Monumental Bronze Co. Bridgeport, Conn." This measures a little more than 10 feet high and includes some interesting symbols. Perhaps the most unusual one is an ear of corn which symbolizes God's bounty and goodness. A sheaf of wheat symbolizes a full life while the urn on top suggests death and being draped likewise symbolizes mourning. The base to this monument was made to look like rough cut stone.

Following the zinc marker presentation a new exhibit in the Cobblestone Museum will open entitled "Designs for Death." The exhibit will show various pieces of antique mourning art including a death mask, hair wreaths, mourning prints and old post-mortem photographs.